of examples given are convincing (Malachi, for example), it seems to me that there is little *explicit* textual evidence that suggests Israel saw Edom as a threat to its chosen status. Assis offers an innovative reading that is indeed plausible; nevertheless, there are other ways in which these texts can be construed, and thus the argument as a whole could be presented in a more heuristic manner.

These quibbles notwithstanding, Assis has provided a valuable and welcome contribution to the literature on the biblical depiction of Esau and Edom. While most likely aimed at biblical scholars, this volume offers a useful and accessible introduction to Israel's neighbor Edom, and its engagement in the closing chapter with rabbinic and medieval literature will also be of interest to those involved in these aspects of Jewish studies.

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Susan Niditch. *The Responsive Self: Personal Religion in Biblical Literature of the Neo-Babylonian and Persian Periods*. The Anchor Yale Bible Reference Library. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015. 190 pp.
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This is a wonderful book. Susan Niditch investigates the ways in which the individual expresses him/herself religiously as depicted in the biblical text and in the archaeology of ancient Israel. She focuses on the period following the Babylonian exile and asks what people did, rather than what they believed. She examines issues of personal responsibility for sin; theodicy; the meaning of incantations, prayer, autobiography, and vows; the role of material objects; prophecy and visions; and finally literary expression. Problematic for this reviewer is the author's need to date certain texts to the postexilic period, and other texts, used for comparison, to the "classical" period. I am not as confident as she in these dates, and if all the writings are postexilic, what becomes of her thesis? Nevertheless, her analysis of these texts proves its worth whatever suspension of disbelief in her dating the reader requires.

Niditch begins by examining the issue of personal responsibility that is expressed in the problematic proverb "parents eat sour grapes and the teeth of the children twinge" (17). The proverb implies that present-day suffering is not caused by our own actions, but of those perhaps already dead. The individual excuses himself from sin, but in doing so, challenges God's justice. Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel claim that the proverb no longer holds, that everyone suffers for her own sin. They want to see the world/God as fair and just, but the result is that all suffering is viewed as deserved. Suffering is explored further in a study of Job and Ecclesiastes. These texts frame an argument between conventional wisdom (accepting one's lot, working hard, trusting God) and its contrast that life is

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absurd, meaningless, and in vain. Both are a reaction to innocent suffering; both ask why we were born.

The incantation, studied next, reflects the desire to control the uncontrollable, and Niditch finds a trajectory from the incantation through the personal lament to autobiography. She cites no instances of incantation in the Hebrew Bible, but closely related to it is the lament (e.g., Lamentations 3). Calamity is caused by YHWH, but YHWH is called upon to take vengeance upon the sufferer's torturers (3:64–66). Personal laments are also frequent among the psalms and in Jeremiah's speeches. A final example of the lament is Nehemiah's memoir. Here, the lament is situated in a personal and historical context.

Niditch next explores the vow, a bargain one makes with God. If you do this for me—relieve me of my suffering—then I'll do this for you. One example is Jacob at Bethel. Another context is war—if you grant victory, I will do thus and so (e.g., Numbers 21:1–3; Judges 11:30–31). Yet a different context is the desire for a child—if you grant me a child, I will lend him to you all the days of his life (1 Samuel 1:11). The Nazarite is the fulfillment of a conditional statement offered to God, and not an unconditional assumption of holiness or asceticism (84).

Niditch notes that personal religion involves the material culture of ancient Israel—pottery, amulets, incense stands, and figurines, as well as places, such as burial caves and sacred groves. Material culture is also relevant in the scene in Zechariah in which the investiture of the priest involves a change of his filthy clothes (worn in Babylon) to the clean linen ones of the priesthood. The materials used in Zechariah's visions form embodied religion. Jeremiah makes use of a soiled loincloth, an earthenware jug, and a yoke—all ordinary objects—to dramatize Israel's apostasy. The objects represent the people's relationship with YHWH, but they also bring about new relationships through their manipulation (103).

Niditch turns next to personal religion par excellence, the vision. She identifies two types, the dream and the symbolic vision. Joseph's dreams and those he and Daniel interpret reflect a culture in which dreams are messages from God to privileged seers. In other visions, the seer ascends to the divine realm, sometimes physically, as in Exodus 24, and sometimes experientially, as in the story of Micaiah's observation of the divine council and the lying spirit sent from God (1 Kings 22:19–23). In Isaiah 6, the image of the divine council serves as Isaiah's initiation rite. Other prophets are also initiated through visionary encounters with the divine (e.g., Ezekiel), or as in later texts, with God's messenger (e.g., Zechariah). Daniel receives a full-blown image of the future via both dreams and a visiting angel.

Niditch lastly reviews characterization in novellas such as Ruth, Joseph, Jonah, and the story of Tamar in Genesis 38, and suggests that these fictional characters display the ways in which model individuals were believed to relate to God.

The Responsive Self is part of the Anchor Yale Bible Reference Library, and as such was tasked with presenting "the best of contemporary scholarship in a way that is accessible not only to scholars but also to the non-specialist. It is committed to work of sound philological and historical scholarship, supplemented by insight

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from modern methods, such as sociological and literary criticism." Susan Niditch amply succeeds in this commitment.

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Yael Shemesh. *Mourning in the Bible: Coping with Loss in Biblical Literature*. Tel Aviv: Ha-kibbutz Ha-me'uḥad, 2015. 424 pp. (Hebrew).
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This book is devoted to the survey of a universal phenomenon: mourning, and the reaction to the loss of a close one. Death being an integral part of life, normative conventions and rituals have evolved in every society alongside individual, personal grief.

Yael Shemesh explores the broad range of reactions to death found in the Bible, and throughout her book, she incorporates alternative reactions from Near Eastern cultures and the ancient world in general. A fascinating picture emerges: on one hand, common modes of expression are universal, and transcend cultural differences; while on the other, each culture forms its own model of mourning in relation to its own religious and cultural world. Mourning in the Bible bears certain resemblances to mourning customs in the ancient world, but differs in other respects. For example, as ancient Egyptians believed that a person continues to exist in a certain form even after death—and that this form requires food—a significant portion of death rites and rituals were concerned with the task of preserving the body and interring it with forms of sustenance. As no such beliefs are found in the Bible, the biblical text does not contain any recurring motifs of embalming or provision of food for the dead.

The book opens with Israel's perception of death during the biblical era, and the ways it mitigates the harsh finality death brings in its wake. In contrast to the accepted position in research, which perceives death in the Bible as something final and absolute (see, for example, Neil Gillman, *The Death of Death: Resurrection and Immortality in Jewish Thought* [Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1997], 59), Shemesh posits that echoes of the idea of existence following death can be found in the Bible. As she argues, "[t]he belief in the continuation of existence after death is almost universal; it would be remarkable, were it to emerge that [this belief] had passed over the nation of Israel during the biblical era" (33). Through this paradigm, Shemesh explores the biblical notion of the deceased's reunion with his family ("gathered to his ancestors"); in her opinion, this expresses not only the collective gathering of bones, but also the reunion of souls (33–35). At the same time, Shemesh notes other methods that alleviate the notion of death's finality, such as the perception of descendants as an alternative for immortality (27–29).

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